

# Dek Unu Magazine

Solo Exhibitions of Fine  
Photoart Portfolios

September, 2018

Featured Artist  
**Tom Finke**

"Silent Places"

Cover "14-34-03"  
© Tom Finke



# Dek Unu Magazine

## Eleven

This is **Dek Unu Magazine**. In Esperanto, dek unu means "eleven." Eleven Images from a single artist. Eleven artists in eleven solo issues each year.

**Dek Unu** publishes the work of a new photoartist in each issue. The artist's work and words are featured alone and in individual focus as the sole purpose for each issue of the magazine. Unlike other arts and letters magazines which might look for work from a variety of artists to support an editorial staff's theme, at **Dek Unu**, theme and imagery are always each artist's own.

**Dek Unu** seeks challenging, complex work that focuses and intensifies perception from artists who demonstrate accomplished technical craft and mature aesthetic vision.

## This Month

Tom Finke's images of contemporary urban Japan, "Silent Spaces," are unnerving. Their flat-light, diffuse focus, and de-populated spaces seem to document the month after every man, woman, and child has simply disappeared. This is poetic, understated photography, not Weston's hyper-real black and white imagery. It is photography that is monochrome, meaning more than the absence of color. Its quiet rewards close attention.

Tom says, "Photographs, like poems, do not explain anything; they present evidence of things seen and they show us ways of seeing. They can be evocative as well as descriptive, ambiguous as well as accurate."































## Artist Interview - Tom Finke

**These are not the pagodas, crowded streets, and view of Fuji that are the cliché images some Westerners expect of Japan!**

One of the things that drew me to these images is that they aren't the typical views of Japan. Reviewing my contact sheets after a session of street photography, I often saw these "interesting places/spaces." Similar images kept presenting themselves to me and I wasn't sure why until I looked at them together. I think that even though we are always working on a project or projects, images present themselves and we aren't always sure why; but there is something that prompts us to make the photograph. It's amazing but I find myself drawn to these places, places that should be teeming with people but, more often than not, there isn't a soul around. It's a strange feeling when you expect to see one thing and you see something totally different.

**These images are spare, de-populated, and seem eerily "post-apocalyptic" in a way.**

All of my images deal with the appearance and feeling of space and these are no exceptions. I am always drawn to these types of places and in fact, I am currently working on a series of images here in Colorado of things that have blown into or are caught in barbed wire. They have a very similar feel, populated but depopulated at the same time. One of the photographers whose work I love is Ralph Eugene Meatyard, and there has always been something about his images that intrigued me... his approach, his subject matter, and the thoughtful way he interpreted the things that he saw.

**Your image, titled "17-01-33A" is extraordinarily affecting: the bare "control room", the analogue gauges, the light...**

I made a series of images in Hachinohe when I traveled there in 2017. There was a major tsunami in 2011 and it felt like I had stepped back in time. When walking around the town, off the beaten path, I thought it was a time capsule. When I entered the building, it was like nothing had moved for six years. The calendar was from 2011, the chair was probably where it was left, parts and pieces of people's lives were abandoned and left to the

"elements." I didn't have my Mamiya 7II camera (the one I usually use for these images) with me, so I used my Leica to capture the scene. I try to look at and be aware of as much photography as possible and I remember seeing images of Hashima Island (often referred to as Gunkanjima) that were made by Yves Marchand and Romain Meffre and the images made by Andrew Moore of Detroit, and I feel these are a complement to those images.



© Jake Belvin

**As a long-time teacher at the college level, do you have thoughts, themes, messages that you always try to instill?**

I don't think you can be a good/effective teacher if you don't practice your craft and are not passionate about what you do. My first photo teacher, Sean Wilkinson, was extremely passionate and passed that passion on to me. It's my very strong opinion that technical expertise underpins everything else in photography, and I believe that to develop technique you must be CONSISTENT. As Ansel Adams, Fred Picker, and the other masters of the craft taught, consistency is crucial to finding and fixing errors. I remember once I heard that when you agitate the tank (for 35mm or 120) you aren't making a martini, only two inversions and a tap of the tank to dislodge the air bubbles. Two tips and a tap. Every time. Consistently. If you have the technical pieces honed, then you can concentrate on the philosophical or aesthetic things that you want to project through your images. I would say, be willing to take a risk, you never know. Be willing to step off the precipice and see what happens. In a word, be passionate and trust yourself.

### You go back to the pre-digital days.

Yes, I am one of the older analogue people. This series is film; I shoot digital but only rarely. Film slows you down and I love the serenity of the darkroom. But more importantly, the darkroom has the ability to translate my vision to a final product. I had such a strong relationship to Wes Disney at Zone VI Workshop because he was open to any possibility and was very giving of his time and wisdom. We stayed in touch for years, until he passed away. I treasure my time there. So, I prefer film. I can't seem to get the same feeling in the final product with digital materials.

**It seems like some gravitate to wet process because it is the "hard way" and, therefore, the proper path for *real* artists.**

I have always printed and worked with film and the darkroom (from traditional silver prints to any number of "alternative" processes –



cyanotypes, platinum/palladium, Polaroid transfers and lifts, Van Dyke Brown prints, and a few others). That's how I learned, I feel comfortable there, and I love the feel and the look of an analogue print. I think that film is making a comeback in a strong way. I notice more and more people are shooting film. I think it's partially a mystique, the fact that each print is unique, and something different from the norm (retro things are in tool). I find my students falling in love with film and the darkroom. I remember people saying, you can't know where you are going unless you know where you've been, so I think having that foundation in the traditional techniques is very important. It's not to say that digital doesn't work, it just isn't my preference. The process or gear shouldn't matter; it's a tool to translate your vision. I tell my students, if you only have rocks and sticks, then you make art with rocks and sticks.

### Talk about your gear?

I love my cameras. I've had all of them for years, they're extensions of me. I have used the same cameras for as long as I can remember, M6, Mamiya 7II, and a 4x5 and 8x10 Deardorff. I use each for whatever project fits or suits the gear. I use one film, Kodak Tri-X (rated lower than the recommendation) (I used Fuji Neopan 400 when I couldn't get Tri-X). I like the film because it's very consistent and reacts the same way all the time, and I know how it reacts for my gear and the way I shoot. I process the film in Kodak HC-110, dilution B (31:1) and print on a cold light head enlarger. I miss the old darkroom papers because they were truly beautiful with a lot of silver. I am currently printing on Ilford Cold Tone Fiber Based paper. No lights, just natural light, I think it helps you to understand how film sees and translates that information, no post production (because I don't shoot digitally but I do occasionally burn and dodge in the darkroom).

### Any tricks of the trade that you couldn't do without?

Good sharp lenses, a good tripod (no carbon fiber for me; carbon fiber shows too many vibrations), a bag full of film, an up to date passport, lots of time, and an open mind. That usually covers most everything.

In your very long career there must have been surprises.

High points? Low points? Rewards? Regrets?

High points? I think maybe my first one-man show and the fact that Sokyusha Publishing in Japan published two books of my street images in late 2015 were a few of the high points. I also loved it when I worked as a curator in the art museum as well. I love to write and it allowed me that opportunity and I relished that. I am also working with a few Japanese photographers, translating information for their books. A particular high point happens when students tell you "thank you" for teaching them; it makes me glad to do what I do. We say you plant the seed and all you want it to do is sprout at some point. For some, it's right away, for others weeks, months, or even years later. As long as it sprouts, that's all that matters.

Low points? Well, yes, I've had my share, rejection letters, having my camera stolen, having gear break down at the most inopportune times, I guess you would say the normal things for photographers. Not so high? When things don't go the way you had hoped. But I feel that I have always managed to learn from every situation in which case, it might not be so bad after all.

Rewards? I am part of an organization called *Friends Without A Border* and they hold a yearly photo auction called "Friends of Friends." The photographers donate all of the images and the proceeds raised go toward building and providing free health care in Southeast Asia. It's something that is VERY close to my heart, and I am so happy that photography can help those in need and I am honored to be part of this.



You have also started a very interesting blog.

Yes, I am working on the blog with my long-time friend and colleague, photographer Eric J. Hessler. The blog is called *Between Photographers - Conversations Between Professionals* - ([www.betweenphotographers.com](http://www.betweenphotographers.com)). We have wide-ranging, in-depth talks and we decided to put our dialog up for others to read and comment on. We organize our discussion around quotes by noteworthy photographers and thinkers about photography and post our reactions to the quotes and to each other. With quotes from Ben Shahn and Henri Cartier-Bresson already in our archive, the newest post reacts to this remark from Japanese photographer Hiroshi Sugimoto:

*"When people call me a photographer, I always feel like something of a charlatan—at least in Japanese. The word shashin, for photograph, combines the characters sha, meaning to reflect or copy, and shin, meaning truth, hence the photographer seems to entertain grand delusions of portraying truth."*

What's next? A new project? Travel? Show(s)? A book?

Currently, I am working on several series including the newest one: "The Wire." I will be returning to Paris Photo in November, AIPAD in New York in the spring. There is an interesting series of shows in Japan called "Kyotographie" that I will be attending when I am there in the spring.

I am searching for a publisher for this work. I would love to find gallery representation in Europe (Germany and France in particular). Additionally, I would love for Steidl to want to publish the work!

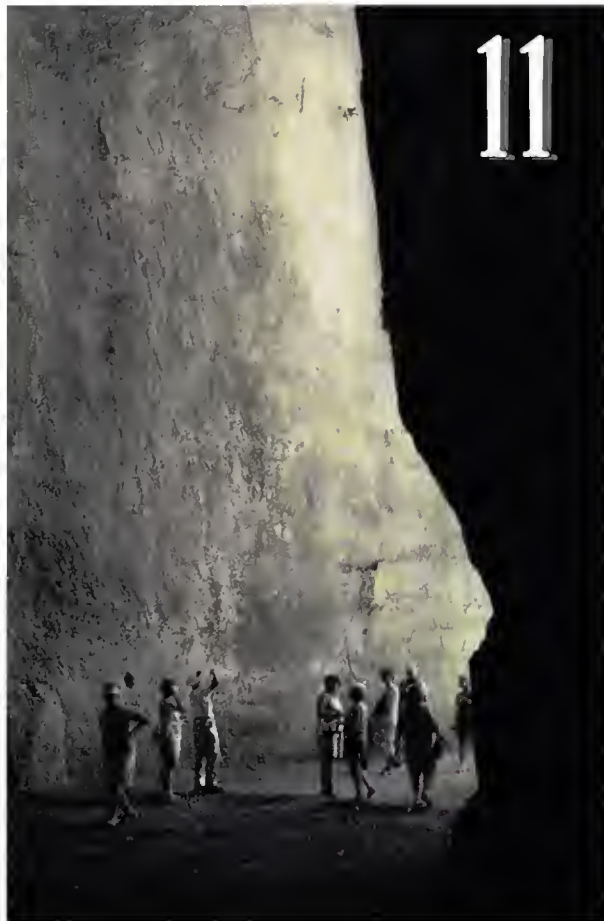
Where can we see more of your work?

My web site is [tomfinke.com](http://tomfinke.com). Instagram is [finkephoto](https://www.instagram.com/finkephoto). I have shows upcoming in Seattle, Denver, and Japan for next year. Please watch for more information on my site. Prints are always available - contact me directly. My books are available on my web site, through [Photo Eye Books](#), Amazon, and in Japan through [Sokyusha](#). Please email the address below with your thoughts/comments on this article and I'll extend \$10 off per book on your purchase.

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## How to submit:

(Submission Period: First of each month to 20th of each month)

E-mail 11 images as file attachments to:

**dekunumag [at] gmail [dot] com**

E-mail subject Line = Artist's name - Title of Project

Web-resolution .jpg only (1024 pixels on the longest side). No watermarks please.

Message must include:

1. Artist's preferred email address
2. Attached files named exactly as follows:
  - Image sequence number (plus)
  - Artist's last name (plus)
  - Underscore (plus)
  - Image\_title (separate words with underscore)

Example. If your name is Edvard Munch, the first two files in your list of attached files would be named:

1Munch\_The\_Scream.jpg  
 2Munch\_Self-Portrait\_with\_Cigarette.jpg  
 (etc.)

3. 1st person bio/cv in English. Mention anything you believe is important or interesting about you or your practice.
4. Artist's statement. Describe the portfolio submitted (English).  
**Dek Unu Magazine** seeks work that is not only technically excellent but also aesthetically coherent.

When you are selected, **Dek Unu** will contact you for an online interview to be included in the issue in which your images appear.

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